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# Negotiating Authority between UNHCR and ‘The People’

Simon Turner

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## ABSTRACT

Refugee camps are exceptional places that are left to the benevolent governing of international humanitarian agencies, and offer unique opportunities to explore the making and un-making of public authority. This article examines how certain groups of young men in a refugee camp in Tanzania manage to establish public authority by relating to ideas of a Burundian moral order, while at the same time relating to the ‘development-speak’ of international relief operations. The refugees’ attempts to establish public authority are highly contested and highly politicized, clashing with the relief agencies’ vision of the camp as non-political. Ironically, the young men who engage in politics in the camp are also closely linked to these relief agencies in their role as brokers between the agencies and the ‘small people’. Public authority is partly produced by the powers that are delegated to them by the agencies and partly formed in the ‘gaps’ in the agencies’ system. Similarly, authority rests in part on the respect that these brokers gain from other refugees — a respect that is earned in numerous ways, including outwitting the international organizations — and in part on the recognition that they get from the very same organizations. In other words, public authority rests on complex relations between legitimacy and recognition and between sovereignty and governmentality.

## INTRODUCTION

Lukole refugee camp in northwest Tanzania houses almost 100,000 Burundian refugees. They are under the surveillance of the Tanzanian Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) representative, the camp commandant, while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is in charge of their ‘care and maintenance’. This article analyses how refugees negotiate public authority in a camp that is seen as heavily governed by international relief agencies, while simultaneously characterized by a perceived collapse of the known moral order of Burundi. It explores how certain groups of young men manage to establish public authority by relating to ideas of a Burundian moral order while at the same time relating to the ‘dev-speak’ of international relief operations, oscillating

between these moral orders and establishing a space of their own. It is shown how party political rivalry plays a vital role in establishing public authority.<sup>1</sup>

It is tempting to see Lukole as an expression of Agamben's Camp as the hidden matrix and *nomos* of modern political space (Agamben, 1998: 166; Agamben, 2000: 37). It is a temporary, exceptional space, created by a sovereign Schmittian decision (Schmitt, 1985; Agamben, 1998: 168–71). Here, the Tanzanian state decides that the refugees are a threat to the nation state and puts them in this exceptional space, which is at once both inside and outside the law. In this case, the refugees are reduced to 'bare life', outside the *polis* of national citizens.<sup>2</sup>

However, although the concepts of bare life and the camp are compelling, Burundian refugees in Lukole are not just any kind of bare life. The camp is being subjected to a strongly moralizing and ethical biopolitical project by humanitarian agencies. Although the Tanzanian 'camp commandant' is sovereign in legal terms, UNHCR and other relief agencies take care of the day-to-day governing of the camp, as they decide the physical layout of the camp, the size and composition of food rations, the food distribution system, the kind of pit latrines to be built and procedures for defining and helping so-called vulnerable groups. They exert a caring biopower, concerned with the life and health of the refugee population (Turner, 2001, 2005).<sup>3</sup> To put it bluntly, while the Tanzanian authorities govern the camp through control and restrictions, international relief agencies — led by UNHCR — govern the camp by trying to foster life.

Whilst public authority seems to lie comfortably in the hands of UNHCR and the camp commandant — and although the camp might give the impression of order and control 'from above' — public authority is far from stable. Constant negotiations, struggles and downright fights take place inside the camp in order to establish some kind of legitimate authority that the refugees can relate to. This article explores how some of these negotiations take place and how public authority emerges in the lacunae that are produced by UNHCR and by the instability of social relations in camp life in general.

## RECUPERATING POLITICS

In the exceptional biopolitical space of the camp, refugees are expected to act as victims, which in turn presupposes that they are void of political

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1. This article is based on more than a year's ethnographic fieldwork in Lukole, 1997–98, including personal interviews, surveys and questionnaires.
  2. For further reading on Agamben's understanding of the camp see Agamben (1998: Part 3) and Agamben (2000: 37–49). For an analysis of the various layers of sovereignty in the camp, see Turner (2005).
  3. This is inspired by a Foucauldian approach to government; see also Cruikshank (1999); Dean (1999); Foucault (1978).

subjectivity (Turner, forthcoming). But the refugees in Burundi are not simply a kind of *tabula rasa* upon which UNHCR can create pure victims in need of help. They carry with them a bloody history and political conflicts. While political rivalry in the camp is often about establishing some kind of order and public authority at the local level, it also draws on these long historical lines in the Burundian conflict. In order to understand what goes on in the camp, we therefore have to put it in a political and historical context.

Burundi has experienced ethnic conflict between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority since the early 1960s. Unlike Rwanda, there was no 'Hutu revolution' around independence, and a small Tutsi elite dominated the state apparatus while officially pursuing an anti-ethnic policy, claiming ethnicity to be the invention of Belgian colonizers. In 1972 hundreds of thousands of Hutu were killed by the army in a response to a minor Hutu uprising (Lemarchand, 1996; Lemarchand and Martin, 1974). This caused hundreds of thousands of Hutu to leave the country and settle in camps in Rwanda and Tanzania, while the Hutu elite were exiled in Belgium and other European countries. It was in the camps in Tanzania that a radical Hutu opposition grew, claiming that Hutu and Tutsi were indeed different races and that the conflict was age old.<sup>4</sup> The *Partie pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu* (Palipehutu) was created in the camps in Tanzania where its radical ethno-nationalist liberation ideology provided answers to the desperate refugees.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the Tutsi dominated one-party regime in Burundi gradually reformed the political system, culminating in 1993 with free multi-party elections. These elections were won by the newly established and moderate 'Hutu' party, *Front des Démocrates du Burundi* (Frodebu), and its charismatic leader, Melchior Ndadaye, became the first democratically elected Hutu president. In the new political environment in the country, Palipehutu's radical ethno-nationalist discourse became obsolete and the party lost influence.

The optimism did not last long, however; President Ndadaye was assassinated by Tutsi officers after only three months in office. This triggered massacres of Tutsi civilians by Hutu all over the country. The army hit back with predictable brutality and the country descended into violence and civil war (Lemarchand, 1996; Reyntjens, 1993). The first refugees in Lukole fled Burundi during the violence of late 1993: they were all Hutu. Some of them had been leading members of Frodebu and had fled the country because they were perceived to be particularly targeted by the army.

In 1994 an armed Hutu rebellion against the regime emerged. It was led by a faction of Frodebu that called itself *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD). Later, Palipehutu's armed wing also intensified its activities. In this way, the violence in Burundi evolved from ethnic massacres and counter reprisals into guerrilla warfare, with the army undertaking brutal

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4. Malkki (1995) vividly illustrates the obsession with history among these refugees.

counter-insurgency measures. This second phase of violence had a huge impact on the civilian population and resulted in large numbers of refugees arriving in Tanzania in 1995–96. In contrast to the first ‘wave’ of refugees, these were ordinary peasants who had not been active in Frodebu. They were often Palipehutu sympathizers.

These social and political differences obviously did not simply fade away in the camp, as camp authorities and refugee agencies might have wished. On the contrary, clandestine politics played a central role in the camp, sometimes resulting in violent conflicts between Palipehutu and Frodebu/CNDD supporters and always forcing young, male refugees to take sides. Either you are with us or you are against us, was the logic of the two rival parties. Frodebu members in the camp all supported CNDD and were actively trying to stamp out the smaller rival, Palipehutu. Palipehutu, meanwhile, enjoyed strong support in some areas of the camp and managed to force opponents to leave those areas, in effect dividing the camp spatially between the two parties. In their struggle to dominate (parts of) the camp, they needed to establish their own form of public authority among the refugee population. This was partially achieved through violence, but — and equally importantly — it was also partially based on positions within the official UNHCR structures of the camp.

Effectively, networks of ‘big men’ were closely linked to political networks, mutually reinforcing each other. In my first fieldwork visits to the camp, I was struck by the number of very young men who held extremely influential positions.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the formal street and village leaders who enjoy a great deal of respect and are important people in the camp, other categories of ‘big men’ are to be found in places that assure them access to public authority. This could be as businessmen or through employment with an NGO. They may even combine a job with an NGO with a small business on the side.<sup>6</sup> These three groups of ‘big men’ have different roles and are different in social composition, although they often overlap and co-operate. Whereas the leaders are the official representatives and intermediaries in charge of governing the refugees, the NGO employees carry out the everyday practices of governing. But neither are merely the instruments of the relief agencies, and they manoeuvre strategically according to very different agendas than those of the relief agencies. Businessmen have a slightly different way of establishing authority, since they generally have as little as possible to do with UNHCR. In the following analysis, we see how the three categories draw on different registers in order to establish authority (for a parallel biographical approach see Hagberg, this issue).

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5. Very little has been written on refugee men. For exceptions see Brun (2000); Sommers (2001). See also Turner (1999, 2004).

6. In fact, the business often gives a higher income, while the NGO job provides the contacts and the influence.

**STEVEN: BEING WHERE THE ACTION IS**

Steven is a polite, softly-spoken young man.<sup>7</sup> He chooses his words carefully and tries to answer all my questions as best he can. He is twenty-five years old and unmarried. He does not want to marry in exile, as he says the responsibility of a family will hinder the possibility of continuing his studies. Steven was a few months short of finishing secondary school when President Ndayaye was assassinated and he fled to Tanzania. He dreams of studying economics.

When I first met him, he was working as a primary school teacher and had done so since arriving in the camp in 1994. A few months later, he was chief security guard for Lukole A. The security guards protect public places like the food distribution centre, the market and the graveyards, and they patrol the camp night and day. They are unarmed and may arrest people for petty offences and keep them locked up for up to three days. More serious crimes are transferred to the police. In Lukole A, with a population of roughly 70,000, there are approximately sixty security guards. In other words, Steven has been given considerable responsibility for someone of his age.

He was given the position after the UNHCR had sacked all the previous guards and 'screened' all new and old applicants to clean out the political activists among them. This followed an incident in May 1997 when the street leaders had complained to the camp authorities that the chief security guard belonged to Palipehutu and was only arresting his political opponents. At the same time, the chief security guard accused the camp chairman — the overall leader of the street leaders — of being pro-CNDD and misusing his power to promote his political allies. These mutual accusations led UNHCR to employ new security guards and instigate new elections of street leaders. Ironically, Steven was deeply involved in politics, but he was pro-CNDD rather than Palipehutu and hence more in line with the camp chairman. There is no doubt that Steven is a CNDD supporter and, judging from the network of 'big men' in the camp that he knows, he is an influential member.

I was able to follow Steven for a while in the camp and have since corresponded sporadically with him. Apart from his job as chief security guard he began teaching French courses for UNHCR staff in Ngara town. He later went to Nairobi to try to study. He failed to find any sponsorship for his studies, but managed to learn some basic computer skills. He returned to Lukole and applied for resettlement in Canada. For some reason, he failed to turn up for the interview and he has now moved to a camp in Kigoma region.<sup>8</sup> He is married — 'after a long despair of soon regaining school', as he writes in a letter in March 2001. Both he and his wife work for

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7. In the following account, all names are fictive.

8. Kigoma is south of Ngara district, where Lukole is situated.

international NGOs in the camp. He still hopes to go to the West and continue his studies.<sup>9</sup>

Steven is a typical example of a young man who held an extremely influential position in the camp. In order to see how this group differs from the camp population as a whole, it is worth examining the NGO employees in terms of social composition. (Later sections will compare NGO workers, street/village leaders and businessmen.) Humanitarian agencies employ refugees in a number of positions as security guards, primary school teachers, social workers/community mobilizers, medical assistants, nurses, laboratory technicians, hospital cooks, as members of OXFAM's Sanitation Information Teams, as loaders in food distribution centres and as construction workers.<sup>10</sup> Refugees employed by NGOs generally have a higher level of education than the average population.<sup>11</sup> Whereas only 17 per cent of the population above the age of sixteen have more than primary school education, at least 85 per cent of the NGO employees in my survey had more than primary school education.

Similarly, NGO employees were significantly better at foreign languages, particularly French. French is a language that is linked to formal schooling in Burundi, and hence mastered by the educated elite of both sexes, while Swahili is learned in the public space of the camp where mostly men move. English is a mixture of the two, since the better educated have in theory been taught English in secondary school, but it is only in the camp that they actually learn to speak it. This is tentatively reflected in Figure 1 where the combination of being male and an NGO employee gives a far higher ratio of English speakers than any of the other groups.

Both English and Swahili were perceived by the refugees themselves to be the best languages to know in the camp as they allow you to 'express yourself' to the NGOs, UNHCR and the Tanzanian authorities.<sup>12</sup> Being able to approach the *Wazungu* (white people) or the Tanzanians was clearly seen as an asset, and people who mastered these skills were often used informally or formally (if they were street leaders, for instance) as brokers by their friends, relatives and neighbours. Language skills also allowed for upward mobility, as knowing English could give access to a job as co-ordinator or

9. This account is based on numerous talks with Steven, including taped interview 18 June 1997; life-story interview (taped) 24 February 1998; interviews 26 August 1997, 27 March 1998 and 28 April 1998; and letters January 1999 and March 2001.

10. NGO employees do not receive wages but so-called 'incentives', as they are already fed by WFP (World Food Programme). At the time of the fieldwork, a school teacher received 14,000 shillings (approximately US\$ 20) a month, while the maximum monthly incentive for a supervisor or a doctor, for instance, was 22,000 shillings.

11. Based on a questionnaire of 464 randomly sampled refugees above the age of 16 and a questionnaire of 123 NGO employees that I conducted in April 1998.

12. In terms of status, English was considered more prestigious than Swahili, just as European or North American agencies and staff were considered more prestigious and more honest than Tanzanian or Kenyan staff.

Figure 1. Language Skills for NGO Employees and General Camp Population (by Gender)

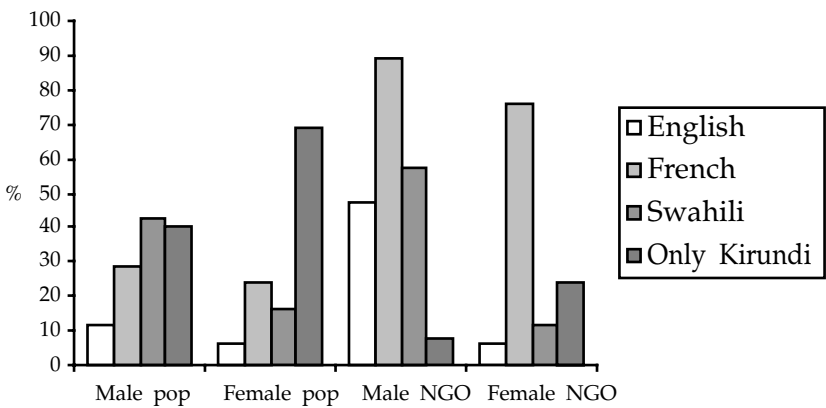
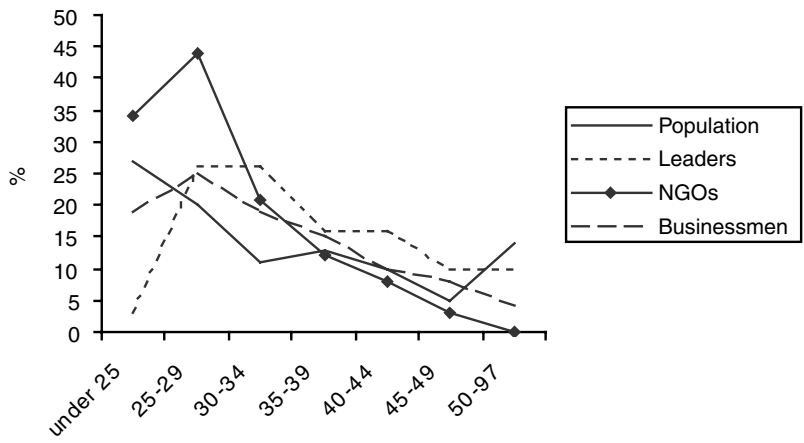


Figure 2. Age Distribution of NGO Employees, Camp Population, Leaders and Businessmen



supervisor with an NGO. Here, French was not of much use, and was rather a social marker left over from Burundi. It was prestigious in the sense that it denoted a certain level of education and social position, but it was perceived to be rather anachronistic and of little use for social mobility in the present or future.

The survey also showed that the NGO employees were generally young, with an average age of twenty-nine (see Figure 2). Steven fits the profile of an NGO employee that attained a pivotal role in the camp. According to their own explanations, the reasons why he and a number of other young men gained such prominent positions was in part due to their formal education (being able to ‘express oneself’, to read and write and to speak foreign



languages), and in part due to a number of personal abilities — to cope in the camp and become a ‘big man’, one had to be mobile, not afraid to approach a *Muzungu* and have a certain nerve to assert oneself, they claimed. These personal abilities link up to the vague idea of being ‘shy’ or not. To not be shy means to dare voice one’s opinion in public in front of a number of foreign and ‘superior’ people. It means knowing the new rules of the refugee game and knowing how to bend them to one’s advantage, rather than being taken advantage of by the new rulers.

Shyness is seen as a Hutu virtue. To be shy is to show good manners. An inferior is expected to be shy towards a superior, whether that is in terms of age, gender, class or ethnicity.<sup>13</sup> Men and women of all ages and all social layers would express concern that these virtues were no longer being upheld in the camp, and expressed a sense of moral decay whereby women no longer obeyed their husbands and children no longer respected their parents. However, the refugees also expressed an ambiguous relation to Hutu shyness and timidity. As much as it was still praised as a virtue, it was also considered a vice. This was most clearly expressed in relation to Rwandan Hutu refugees who allegedly were not shy but ‘proud’. In Lukole, people would boast of having learned ‘tricks’ from the Rwandans. They were, for instance, grateful that the Rwandans had taught them to outsmart UNHCR when the agency was doing a ‘head count’: ‘The Rwandans were very clever. They knew what medicine to use to remove ink’<sup>14</sup> (Diary, 27 October 1997). They believed that the longer one lived in the camp and the more one learned to shed one’s shyness, the better that person would cope.

NGO employees like Steven take advantage of the fact that the old hierarchies of Burundi are no longer valid, and carve out a place for themselves by shedding their Hutu naivety and their position as inferiors. By linking up with the international agencies in the camp, they make themselves indispensable as brokers. They know the language of the humanitarian workers — not only literally Swahili and English, but also in terms of the technical NGO language of ‘food rations’, ‘community development projects’, ‘hygiene sensitization programmes’, and all the other codes that need deciphering in order to handle and please the new masters in the camp. Through their access to UNHCR,<sup>15</sup> they are able to shed their shyness; however, in order to gain respect and prove their ‘intelligence’ they must not merely follow the orders of UNHCR. They should preferably be seen to outsmart the omnipotent organization.

13. See Malkki (1995) for an excellent analysis of ethnic stereotypes among Hutu refugees. Lemarchand (1996, 1999) also deals with the role of myth-making in the region. Such stereotypes were also found by earlier ethnographers, although they tended to take them at face value (see Albert, 1963; Maquet, 1961; Trouwborst, 1962).

14. For verification purposes, each person dipped their fingers into ink that was impossible to remove.

15. For the sake of simplicity I am referring only to UNHCR, although the same applies to a number of agencies in the camp. The refugees normally also refer to UNHCR as a monolithic intentional actor and the main locus of power.

NGO employees get to function as intermediaries between the refugees and the agencies. In this sense they resemble the leaders. But whereas the leaders are the official representatives and intermediaries in charge of the refugees, the NGO employees carry out the everyday practices of governing. They give information about hygiene, they help the 'vulnerables', they teach the children, they mobilize the youth and they take care of security. This is where biopower is exercised. The employees make use of their strategic positions between donor funds and the beneficiaries. The camp population's access to essential resources — such as medical help, education and security — goes through these intermediaries. It thus becomes important to be on good terms with an NGO employee who can ask favours in return, thus creating the basis for patron–client relationships.

The jobs with NGOs are so attractive that people would pay to be allowed to work for an NGO. If an employee gets someone else a job, he or she can ask for half of the new employee's wages: 'These people who came recently don't know where to find the jobs. They don't know the mechanisms of the camp. These people who have already got jobs here in Lukole, charge them some taxes in order to get a job. And these people are very poor. They don't have shillings to pay. That's why they don't have jobs' (village leader, B3). This quote illustrates the appeal of being employed by an NGO. It also reveals a perception that the NGO employees make up a close-knit and impenetrable network. To be employed by an NGO is about more than earning extra money; it is about becoming part of a network. These networks were often linked to the political parties. In this way, the employees could use their key positions as brokers between the refugees and the relief agencies as leverage for their political goals.

Palipehutu members would complain that they were treated badly in the clinics, because the staff was CNDD affiliated (Joseph, interview 4 May 1998). According to these rumours, the refugees working for NGOs would convince the corrupt Tanzanian staff of their version of events, thus marginalizing Palipehutu members further. As we saw in the case of the conflict between the previous chief security guard and the camp chairman, it was vital for both parties to convince the international agencies and the Tanzanian authorities of their version, demonizing the opponent as 'politically biased', while presenting themselves as politically neutral, serving the interests of the community.

#### **JAMES: BETWEEN MOBILITY AND SEDENTARY KNOWLEDGE**

Every street or village<sup>16</sup> had a leader, elected by the refugees. These refugee leaders attended fortnightly meetings with the UNHCR field officer or field assistant, camp commandant, and representatives from relevant NGOs.

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16. Lukole A was organized into streets, while Lukole B was divided into villages.

Basically, they were meant to be intermediaries between the refugee population and the agencies in control. They would voice refugees' complaints that they had lost their ration cards, that nurses treated them disrespectfully, or that OXFAM was pulling down their latrines. On the other hand, they were expected to disseminate information from the agencies to the population. This could be the field officer warning refugees to 'behave', or explaining to them why it is so important for OXFAM to make sure that they build mud brick latrines ('It is for your own good').

James is the village leader in B2 in Lukole B. The residents of B2 are people who had lived in Tanzanian villages for years and who were rounded up by the Tanzanian authorities in late 1997.<sup>17</sup> James had fled Burundi in 1993, and was among the first to arrive in Lukole when it was established in 1994. However, in 1996 he decided to try to earn some money and left the camp to work for a rich refugee smuggling coffee out of Burundi.<sup>18</sup> After a while, he moved to a Tanzanian village and worked as a builder until he, too, was rounded up and put into Lukole B. Perhaps his longer experience of camp life makes him a natural leader in a part of the camp where most of the inhabitants have only just arrived and still do not know 'the mechanisms of the camp', such as how to make the food rations last for two weeks, or what a 'community mobilizer' or a 'vulnerable' is.

James is twenty-five years old. He is unmarried because he fears being forcefully repatriated, and having a family would be too much of a responsibility in such a situation. He has no job and no business in the camp. He had almost finished primary school but was interrupted in his studies, in part by 'the troubles' in 1991<sup>19</sup> and in part because his father had left for Uganda and James had to help his mother in the fields. He went back to school in 1993, hoping to do secondary school and get a job in the administration or the army, but had to flee shortly after.

He believes that he was elected for his personality. In the intimacy of camp life, it only takes a few days to get to know somebody, he explains. People were fed up with his predecessor, who was also young but better educated, because he drank too much and was too loud mouthed. James converted to the Seventh Day Adventist Church after a close shave with death while visiting Burundi in 1995, so he does not drink at all. He also won over the other candidate, a jolly old man who had worked for UNICEF years before and who made people laugh when he presented himself for elections.

On the issue of being a good leader in Burundi, James explains: 'When they used their leadership in order to get something, these people were not

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17. For accounts of this brutal exercise see Human Rights Watch (1999).

18. Burundi was subject to an embargo by neighbouring countries after Buyoya's *coup d'état* in July 1996.

19. In November 1991 an abortive Hutu uprising (during which scores of civilian Tutsi were killed) resulted in thousands of Hutu being arrested and killed by the army (Lemarchand, 1996)

respected. But there were leaders who were respected such as these ones who gave good advice or who had tried to solve problems in a good way. These people who were not shy — these people who were more proud — these people were not respected' (interview, 19 February 1998). He explains that it is important for a leader to be humble and kind. Being too 'proud' is associated with Tutsi arrogance and opposed to being shy. Although shyness can be a hindrance in the camp, it is still perceived by some to be a virtue to be kind and humble. If you also know how to solve disputes and give advice (and punish when necessary), you will be respected. James voted in the 1993 election but he assures me that he is not interested in politics. 'Politics is dealt with by these people who have been in school — who are educated', he says.

James represents quite a different 'type' than Steven. He is not as educated, he is not so keen on politics, and he does not appear to be in the limelight of international organizations. There are, however, some similarities in terms of age and in terms of the role that he plays as an intermediary between the population and the international agencies and Tanzanian authorities. Generally, James is in a more ambiguous position in terms of establishing public authority in the camp. Unlike Steven, he is not exclusively an expression of the new forces of change. Neither does he simply rely on the moral order of 'the good old days' and attempt to reinstall an idealized patriarchy and gerontocracy.

The leaders make up a more complex group than the NGO workers in terms of age and class, as demonstrated by the results of my survey of sixty-two street and village leaders.<sup>20</sup> It was, however, the youthfulness of the street leaders that surprised me when first coming to Lukole. I had expected to see only men over forty at the leaders' meetings, but as can be seen from Figure 2, 29 per cent were in their twenties, 47 per cent were in their thirties, and only 24 per cent were forty or above.

Leaders create public authority by drawing on a number of moral registers and ideals. Whereas James emphasizes being humble or 'shy', others emphasize qualities similar to those of the NGO workers, namely mobility, language and education. This is summarized in the more abstract 'not being shy'.<sup>21</sup> The following extract comes from an interview with the village leader from village B3:

Yesterday we got information that today we will have a meeting with the representative of *Wilaya*.<sup>22</sup> Today at four o'clock. And because I am quite young, I took a megaphone and

20. Unfortunately, for practical reasons, only five of the leaders in the survey are from Lukole B where roughly one third of the population live. Lukole B has quite a different history from Lukole A, resulting in a very different socio-economic and political profile.

21. The question is whether James's own success cannot be attributed to his experience of camp life and his ability to manoeuvre in the UNHCR defined space.

22. Tanzanian town council.

went around villages — all villages — thirteen villages — and told them that you will have a representative of *commune* who will come here to hold meeting. . .

So yesterday you were told by whom?

Camp Manager

So you were very quick. Immediately you took a megaphone and went. . .

Yeah, yeah. And because I am quite young I have to deal with many activities in a short time.

But if it is an old one, he can't. That's why they have to elect someone who is very quick: someone who is very quick and who is intelligent.

Here, liaising with camp authorities and those who are in charge of resources in the camp is seen as an important role of the leader. He has to be able to react fast to any new situation. This is impossible for older men, he says. He continues that the leader has to be able to 'explain the problem fluently':

According to Burundi customs, we usually respect elders. But . . . if there is a problem, he is not fast — to go to explain the problem. It may happen that when they are going to food distribution, it may happen that some people don't have food. And the leader has to go to explain the problem — and he has to explain fluently the problem. Because when he doesn't explain the problem fluently, the people who miss the food, they don't have. They don't have it. (Village leader, B3)

Although expressing oneself fluently is not necessarily an ability exclusive to the youth, it is linked in his discourse. It goes with the same idea of not being shy and being able to express oneself openly that I found with the NGO employees. It also links with being able to speak foreign languages, especially Swahili and English. Knowledge of languages was pointed out by the refugees themselves as an important asset for leaders, especially the young, extrovert ones; it was also mentioned by the leaders: 'Those people who are working with NGOs, different NGOs — are Tanzanians. And Tanzanians don't know how to speak French. They know how to speak Swahili and English. It is good to know Swahili language' (village leader, B3).

According to my surveys there does not seem to be a significant difference between the language skills of the leaders and the population in general. In spite of the ideal of the leader speaking Swahili (and perhaps English), in fact only about half of them do so.<sup>23</sup> This affirms our picture of the leaders as a mixed group, but it also shows that people choose from a variety of elements when defining an ideal leader. In the camp, they believe that mobility and language must be useful traits: to communicate with the all-powerful UNHCR is vital. But they also evaluate the leader according to other criteria, criteria which draw on the image of the ideal leader in Burundi and thus help to preserve some kind of continuity. As James emphasizes, this might be to be humble. So when electing a leader for their particular street or village, they measure the candidate partly according to his abilities

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23. The leaders differ from the male population as a whole with comparatively few leaders claiming to speak either Swahili, French or English.

at communicating with NGOs, and partly according to Burundian values and ideals.<sup>24</sup>

Another criterion for becoming a leader in the camp, it is claimed, is to be able to read and write: 'UNHCR told them that they had to elect someone who will know to make a report, or to represent others. Or when there is a problem, to know to explain the problem fluently' (village leader, B3). Although the leaders are not as well educated as the NGO workers, they still differ sharply from the average population in this regard: virtually all (98 per cent) have some kind of formal education while almost a third (29 per cent) of all men<sup>25</sup> in Lukole have no formal education.

The kind of knowledge (or 'intelligence' as they would often say in the camp) obtained from formal education is placed in opposition to the knowledge of the old men. According to this discourse, the old men's knowledge is based on experience. It is rooted in history, in a knowledge of people's lineages and their past, and it is rooted in locality; a knowledge of the land. This kind of knowledge is useless in the camp where nobody knows his neighbour, localities are new and the past is irrelevant.

The statistics on refugee leaders do not support such a drastic break as we are made to believe from the interviews with the young leaders. When I asked people what were the most important features of a good leader, the answers most certainly were more complex. As James says, it depends on your personality. A good leader is humble and knows how to give advice. Being able to mediate in conflicts, being able to find 'the truth' and being kind were abilities that were mentioned again and again in Lukole. To have these qualities, one obviously does not need a higher education. Neither does one need to know a lot of languages. In fact, education, language skills and not being shy may work against you. In other words, there is a risk that these well-educated, young parvenus might forget their background — their humble Hutuness — and become 'too proud', too much like the Rwandan or worse still; like the Tutsi. So while an educated young leader has the advantage of being able to express himself to camp authorities and make sure that the refugees are not tricked too much by corrupt Tanzanian staff, an older, more 'humble' man of the people may be more respected when it comes to solving problems between neighbours and when it comes to maintaining a Hutu moral order.

To sum up, the refugees are struggling between different concepts of being a 'big man' and different perceptions of how to deal with the new configuration of government in exile. Should they opt for the extrovert, mobile, young man who is not shy as the best option for achieving results in the new setting of the camp, or should they opt for the old man who symbolizes some sort

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24. This is not to say that Burundi functioned that way. Rather, Burundi was conjured up as a kind of lost Paradise in the camp.

25. As all but one of the leaders were male, it makes more sense to compare with the male population rather than with the population as a whole.

of continuity and surety? In practice a leader is often a compromise between the two, like James who is young and mobile but is not well educated and not part of the NGO 'in-crowd'. He tries to live up to ideals of being a kind and humble leader, but he also knows the 'mechanisms of the camp' as they say, better than most others in his particular village, due to being an experienced refugee.

### PATRICK: MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS

I first met Patrick in one of the forty medium-sized bars in Lukole A, where you sit inside a building made of mud bricks and UNHCR plastic sheeting, sometimes cut in decorative strips. There are homemade tables and benches, and often a radio playing Zairian pop music or Bob Marley highlights. Here they mainly sell *gua-gua*, banana wine that is more expensive and much preferred to the maize beer *mugorigori*. It is served in glasses that are almost clean rather than in communal plastic containers. The Tanzanians sell it at the junction outside the camp to the bar owners in Lukole.

Patrick is quite an established businessman.<sup>26</sup> In spite of being only twenty-two years old, he has had his own bicycle taxi business for three years, transporting people and goods on the back of his bicycle for a fee. Typically, he would transport goods to and from the junction about two kilometres outside the camp for 200 shillings. He earned enough money to buy the bicycle by working for an NGO as a watchman when he first arrived in the camp.

Patrick's parents were farmers and he only finished primary school before getting a job cleaning and cooking for a white *padre* in Burundi. His parents had fled Burundi in 1972 and he was born in Rwanda where the family stayed until 1982. He talks openly about being like a Rwandan, and claims that the Rwandans are better businessmen than Burundians:

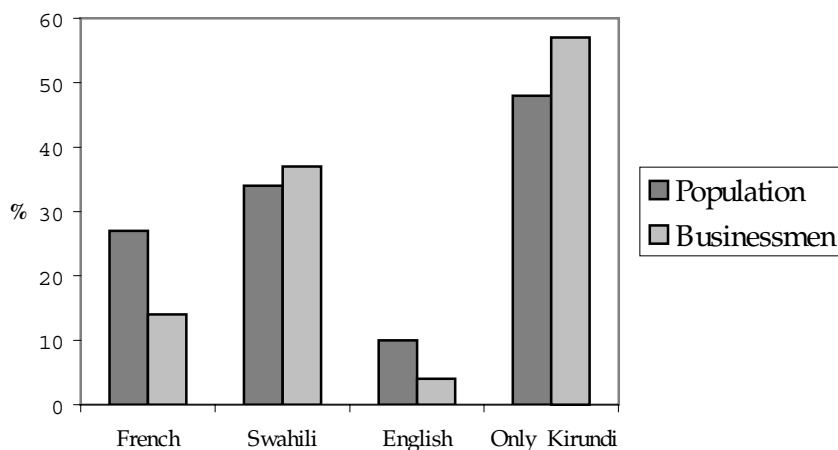
The reason is because Rwandese [Hutu] have been in government, have been in power. And they had chance not to be afraid of anyone. But these ones of Burundi have been ruled by Tutsi many years ago. That's why they are always afraid of some people. . . .

But this happened before. Because now Burundese are experienced by Rwandese. Nowadays they are equal. They act at the same level. Nowadays, Burundese became more businessmen, like the Rwandese.

In Patrick's opinion, contact with Rwandans in the camp has changed the Burundians — but only for the better. He feels that he has had an advantage

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26. Business is the term used in English (*d'affairs* in French) for any kind of income-generating activity that is not wage labour. In Swahili, the term *za shughuli*, which literally means 'of the things', nicely covers this informal wheeling and dealing. One of the wealthier refugees in the camp was nicknamed *Za Shughuli* because he worked as a school teacher, owned one of the biggest bars in the camp, worked as a photographer at weddings and the like, and generally had a lot of projects going on.

Figure 3. Language Skills of Camp Population and Businessmen<sup>27</sup>

over other Burundians because he grew up in Rwanda and therefore has their mentality. When asked whether he would have an advantage over those who had remained in Burundi if he went back there, Patrick replies: 'Of course we will be more intelligent than those who stayed in Burundi'.

In the market in Lukole A alone, I counted forty-eight restaurants, thirty-two bars, ninety-five shops selling shoes, clothes, batteries, salt, rice, etc., ninety-four *mugorigori* outlets and 116 market stalls selling fresh fruit, vegetables and maize. Apart from this, there were hammer mills, hairdressers, radio repairers and a row of other small businesses. The businessmen are not part of the educated elite. Their level of education is not much different to that of the population in general and they seem to speak less French and English (see Figure 3). Surprisingly, they do not seem to speak much more Swahili than average. This could in part be explained by the fact that the local language, Kihangaza, is so similar to Kirundi that they understand each other, rendering Swahili superfluous for interaction with Tanzanians from neighbouring villages. It is only when communicating with NGO staff, police officers and government staff who often come from other parts of Tanzania, that Swahili becomes necessary.

Although they do not belong to the educated elite, many of the businessmen have significantly higher incomes than the NGO employees, and the wealthier among them would often be referred to as 'big men'. They are respected for their success and wield considerable authority. Even the poor businessmen demonstrate that they are not dependent on UNHCR rations, and that they do not just sit around the *blindé*, waiting to be fed but take responsibility for their own lives and make a living of their own. What is more, they take

27. Based on a survey of seventy-nine businessmen.



responsibility for their families.<sup>28</sup> The owner of a *patisserie* explains that he can now afford to buy some decent food for his wife to prepare for the whole family (Diary, 1 September 1997). Being able to feed one's wife and children demonstrates an attempt to normalize life, to stabilize things as they ought to be and ideally were in Burundi where men acted as protectors and providers. It is about taking matters into one's own hands and re-establishing some sense of order.<sup>29</sup>

Patrick and his friends assured me that they were not interested in 'politics'. Because they work so hard, they do not have time to listen to the radio and involve themselves in such matters. And they add 'it is not good to speak about something you don't know'. A radio repairer echoes their attitude. The hardworking businessmen cannot afford the luxury of discussing politics, either here or in Burundi, he claims: 'Myself, I don't know how that problem happened in Burundi. I don't know because in [the] morning I wake up, I go to work, and [in the] evening I come back — and just it was time for eating so I didn't have time to go and discuss with others about Burundi problems' (radio repairer, 20 April 1998).

In other words, there is a self-image of a hardworking man who earns an honest living and can take care of himself. But he also minds his own business and is not interested in getting involved in politics, which is both a waste of time and potentially dangerous. This is in stark contrast to the educated elite who work for NGOs and who constantly feel that they have to measure their personal strategies in relation to the 'common cause' of the Burundian people.

When discussing the possibilities of getting a passport in Dar-es-Salaam in order to be able to travel to Kenya for further studies, an educated refugee who worked for an NGO explained that the very rich traders often travel to Dar-es-Salaam, 'but they are not interested in politics' he said, with contempt (Albert, 1 October 1997). He clearly links politics and education, and interprets the reluctance of the businessmen to get involved as an aversion to 'politics'. So whilst there is a certain pride in minding one's own business and staying out of politics among the businessmen, this attitude is perceived very differently by the politically active, educated elite. They see the businessmen's attitude as selfish and short-sighted as opposed to their own self-sacrificing long-term strategies.

To sum up, businessmen are an important component in establishing authority in Lukole as the more successful among them have most certainly become 'big men' who command respect in the camp. However, their strategy differs from both the NGO employees and the street/village leaders. Respect

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28. Most of the business people that I interviewed (sixty-four out of seventy-nine) were men and with a few notable exceptions, the female respondents either had small businesses selling vegetables and/or worked with their husbands.

29. As I have argued elsewhere (Turner, 1999, 2004) it is also a question of recuperating masculinity.

is won neither through formal education and language skills nor through age, experience and knowledge of Burundi customs. Their knowledge is a third type that is very much linked to the camp context and learned neither in school nor in the Burundian hills. It is a very concrete strategy, based in the present context of the camp rather than in a nostalgic past or a utopian future.

At first sight, they do not seem to be involved in public authority, as they stay away from politics and make no pretence of representing the refugee population, just as they would rather avoid too much contact with camp authorities.<sup>30</sup> However, due to their success in following livelihood strategies that strengthen their independence from the relief agencies, they have become 'big men' who are respected in the camp. While NGO workers and street leaders establish themselves as brokers and gain powerful positions due to access to NGOs, businessmen gain respect and authority by proving their independence from — and defiance of — official camp authorities.

### THREE WAYS OF NEGOTIATING PUBLIC AUTHORITY

In Lukole, an older order seems to have disappeared, making way for new orders to form. It is these new orders that young men like Steven, James and Patrick seek to exploit. In the de-structured space of the camp, they have been able to exploit the liberating potential of camp life and become liminal experts. They have managed to carve out a space for themselves in the camp and have, to varying degrees and along different paths, managed to out-manoeuvre the old patriarchy and become the new 'big men' in the camp. No longer inhibited by Tutsi peers taking the best positions, young semi-educated men (and some women) are given important positions with relief agencies in the camp. No longer inhibited by norms and social expectations, young entrepreneurial men start up businesses of all sorts with the motto that they have nothing to lose — and some succeed and become 'big men' in the camp. And finally with knowledge of locality and history being more or less irrelevant in the camp, old men appear to be losing their grip on leadership while a number of young men are taking up the challenge of being street and village leaders.

Success in Lukole is about mobility, language skills, education and openness. There is an emphasis on youth and change and the old hierarchies are seen as archaic and useless. But this process is neither complete nor one-way. It is not a question of all the old men and all the old traditions being rejected. People are generally ambivalent about change and the status of 'big men'. They also long for the good old days. They despise the Rwandans for their rude behaviour and take pride in their distinctly Burundian behaviour as

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30. This is not completely possible, as they pay taxes to the camp commandant. The market committee also negotiates with relief agencies on how to regulate business in order to maintain certain hygiene standards, for example.

law-abiding citizens. They believe that women should respect their husbands and children their parents. In other words, there is a constant struggle between orthodox and heterodox opinion, between longing for the moral order of yesterday and striving for the opportunities created in the camp.

These 'big men' are respected for taking their future into their own hands and acting accordingly, rather than passively waiting in the camp to see what the future might bring. Whereas the businessmen take care of themselves and their nearest family in the present, the political elite are thinking of the future and of their country. In the camp, politicians are respected — even feared — as they have the courage to defy UNHCR laws and play by their own rules. In this way, they have managed to reclaim their position as men — as those who set the agenda and must be obeyed. These strategies ensure them authority in the camp. They can claim respect from other refugees. By struggling for 'the cause' of the Hutu people, Steven claims legitimacy as a big man in the camp; James claims legitimacy as a leader by being 'kind and humble'; and Patrick can claim a position as a 'man of the people' by minding his own business.

Ironically, they do not work entirely against the grain of UNHCR and MHA. In particular the political elite, employed by relief agencies or acting as official leaders, have a complex relation to camp authorities. They are employed by them; they use their access to the agencies as a means to assert their own positions *vis-à-vis* the broader population; and they also seek recognition from the international agencies. Of course there is an amount of strategic self-interest involved here, as both want to maintain their positions. But there is also an urge to be recognized by the international community as legitimately representing the refugees.

Public authority is produced partly by the powers that UNHCR delegates to these actors, and partly by the power bases that the refugees manage to build up in the gaps in UNHCR's system. Similarly it rests partly on the respect that these brokers gain from other refugees — a respect that is earned in numerous ways such as outwitting the international organizations — and partly on the recognition that they get from the very same organizations (see also Buur, this issue).

In short, this study has argued that a certain group of young men have made the best out of their positions as young and mobile, and have adapted to the new setting, the new rules and the new master. To adapt to the new master does not mean always to obey him but rather to know how to please him and how to make the best of the relationship with him. This may involve cheating him but it does not involve confronting him. The perception of UNHCR as an omnipotent other that controls their lives from above remains pervasive in the camp setting. It is the ultimate locus of power, for better or for worse. While being perceived as the agent that emasculates them and reduces them to helpless receivers of alms, it is also seen as the ultimate source of recognition. The refugees do not 'resist' it. Rather, they must relate to it and make the best of it.

This is where brokers like Steven and James and, to a lesser degree, Patrick enter the picture. Their authority is derived from both above and below. When seeking recognition from above — from UNHCR — they must prove themselves to be the true representatives of 'the refugee community'. This must be done within the language of the international agencies. Likewise, when establishing authority among 'the people', they must prove their abilities to manoeuvre in the world of international relief agencies. It is exactly from their ability to span the gap between relief agencies and the population that they derive authority. And it is in all their interests that the gap remains.

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